

# Arizona Wildlife Views

## *Outdoor Television for Everyone*

BY LEE ALLEN

"Arizona Wildlife Views," the TV show, has come a long way since its early days with a lone studio narrator looking into a single camera lens and speaking to a few loyal watchers. The most recent 13-week series, filmed

in the field with state-of-the-art equipment, reached close to 1.8 million viewers. With reruns broadcast on cable access stations, more than 2 million homes across the state will watch and learn about the Arizona outdoors compliments of the

Below, filming for "Arizona Wildlife Views," the Arizona Game and Fish Department's outdoor TV program, takes the show's producers to all four corners of the state and most points in-between.



GARY SCHAPER



DAVE DE MEDICIS



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GEORGE ANDREJKO

Arizona Game and Fish Department.

"We're the No. 1 game in town, the best bang for the buck for Arizona hunters and fishing enthusiasts to find out what's going on in our outdoors," says the show's current videographer and longtime Game and Fish employee, Gary Schafer.

It was not always thus, especially at the start. Early iterations began appearing on a single Phoenix television station in the late 1960s with host Bill Sizer joined by several co-anchors including former Game and Fish Information Officer Bob Hirsch. "The show, originally just 15 minutes in length, was Hirsch's idea, and it was a jewel," says Sizer. "We had no technical tricks like fades or dissolves or anything like that, but despite our lack of sophistication, people liked it. There were no reruns, so we shot raw film constantly, right up to show time—and things got pretty frantic. Despite the fact we were up against "Ironsides" and "Flip Wilson," we still got our share of the audience."

Sizer and Hirsch, both knowledgeable on a variety of outdoor subjects, could often be seen perusing reference books right before show time to learn more about mountain lions or sandhill cranes. "We were a bunch of talking heads who invited wildlife managers to tell about their units, what game and fish were there, and the problems they encountered," remembers



BOB HIRSCH



BILL SIZER

Right, shooting an early "Wildlife Views" firearms safety film, "This Little Bullet," with John Wayne. Above, the first "Wildlife Views" host, Bill Sizer (right), during the show's "talking heads" days.



Hirsch. "The Department's mission was a lot simpler than the complicated organization it is today. These were great times, and we were given the freedom to be creative. Despite our limited resources we produced some good stuff, and although the show was taped, we never redid a segment, so it might as well have been live television."

Shortly after its inception, Wes Keyes joined the agency and the show, and until his retirement in July 2002, appeared as program host for three decades. "I'd be lying if I told you I won't miss it," says Keyes. "But it's time for somebody else to step up and take the program to the next level."

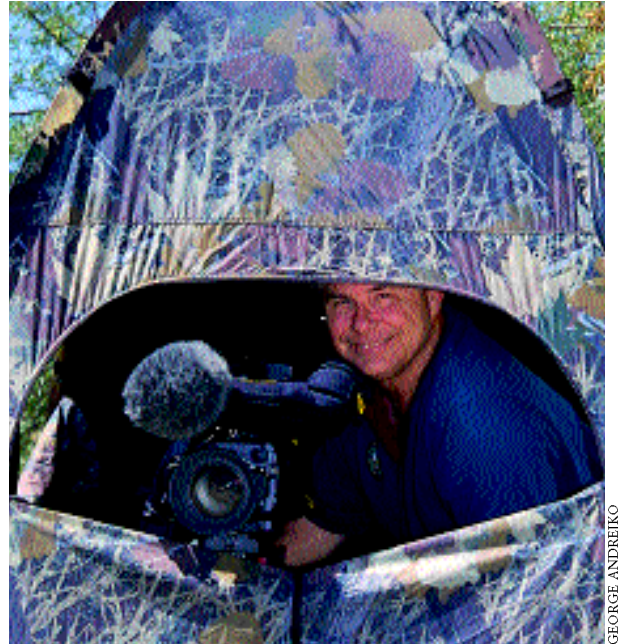
There were some on-again/off-again times for this distinctly original TV fare. Just out of its infancy, the fledgling show was put on the shelf when a severe drought in the early 1970s put the agency in a budget crunch. The Department instead filmed special outdoor programming that aired on several stations in the Valley and produced a series of films on wildlife and fishing subjects—including one of its early prizes, a firearms safety film called "This Little Bullet." John "Duke" Wayne was part of the cast.

Half-hour shows under the guise of "Arizona Outdoors" began show-

ing up again in the late 1980s, with Ned Smith, another early AWV host. Those shows went off the air after a two-year run. By the fall of 1991, "Arizona Wildlife Views" was once again airing as an annual 13-program series. In late 1994, discussions began with PBS affiliates in Tucson (KUAT) and Phoenix (KAET) to begin broadcasting the series in the spring of 1995. They've never looked back—unless it was to pick up one of several awards.

"This show does great things for the Game and Fish Department," says Keyes. "Viewer surveys tell us that the program keeps the Department in the minds of those who enjoy outdoor activities. We air on 16 local cable access channels, and they run the programs forever, six times a day."

The now-retired video production supervisor says his 31 years flew by and gave him more action and memories



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than scrapbooks will hold. "I've been to all four corners of the state and most of the outdoor nook-and-crannies in-between, and it's been awesome." Programming in the early days involved such things as filming the first Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep release in the Blue River drainage; netting Apache trout from Soldier River; using a long lens to shoot rattlesnakes coiled in paloverde trees when Painted Rock Reservoir filled with flood waters; and reintroducing antelope in Clayhole Wash on the Arizona Strip.

His last official film assignment was covering the recent Rodeo-Chediski fire in the White Mountains. "Utterly unbelievable," he says of the 469,000-acre fire, a dramatic ending for his career.

Keyes, 17-year veteran

Above, videographer/producer Gary Schafer, a 17-year veteran of the show. Left, new-kid-on-the-block Dave de Medicis. Right, Wes Keyes on his last official assignment covering the recent Rodeo-Chediski fire in the White Mountains.



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Schafer, and the new-kid-on-the-block, producer Dave de Medicis, all have their share of memories. Schafer still chuckles about his first day on the job, when he was fresh out of school and lacking in field experience. The call came abruptly to do a shoot in the wild—now. He scrambled, made it to the remote site, set up his gear—and only then remembered that his tape stock was back at the office. Each day on the job is different, he says. “In the middle of June one year, I was on a Flagstaff mountaintop filming endangered plants on Agassiz Peak and having to defrost my lens. The next day I was in sand dunes in Yuma burning my legs through denim jeans it was so dang hot. Freezing cold one day, burning hot the next, all in a 24-hour period to get the job done.”

Keyes figured the hot-cold, up-down variations were supposed to be part of the task in bringing story and picture to his audiences. “From 120 degrees in the Mohawk Dunes to 10 degrees in a turkey blind at Chevelon, from fighting gale-force winds in a 64-foot houseboat on Lake Powell to freezing cameras in high-country elk scouts, from treeing a mountain lion on mule back to collaring bears on Four Peaks—I’ve come darn close to doing it all and sharing it with our viewers.” His favorite trip? After a long pause, his response is what it has always been: “I can’t answer that. There’ve been too many good trips to try and single out just one.”

The outdoors and the audiovisual world have captivated new producer de Medicis for years—“National Geographic” and “Wild Kingdom” were part of his youth. Today he not only produces “Arizona Wildlife Views,” he and his dog Smoky watch other outdoor shows together. Their TV training time has helped the crew earn a trophy case full of awards, like Emmys from the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences and accolades from the National Press Photographers Association. “I’m a storyteller and this show, from initial shoot to final edit, allows me to do in-depth story telling.”

While trying to be all things to all people is often a setup for failure, the show subjects currently available on “Arizona Wildlife Views” come close to accomplishing that mission. Upcoming shows include a look at big-game animals, rattlesnake relocation, shooting sports, boating safety, trout fisheries, and three-wheeling. The change from early-day single-focus feature-oriented presentations to the current magazine format was a tough decision. “Producing a magazine-format show, covering two or three topics in a single program, and having to shoot some three dozen segments a year is labor intensive, especially for a three-person crew,” says Keyes. “It’s a big mountain to climb, but the results have been very favorable. Viewers enjoy the mix of subjects. If there is something they aren’t particularly interested in, they’ll stay tuned for the next segment.”

Pride of ownership is evident in talking with anyone connected with the show. “We have a foot in several worlds,” says Schafer. “We’re part of the entertainment industry as well as being educators in the recreation field. We compete with every other outdoor show on TV, from Jimmy Houston to ESPN and the Outdoor Life Channel, for our viewing audience. We’ve found our niche as the outdoor voice for the State of Arizona, and what we do, we do well.”

“The Department has reason to be proud of AWW,” says

Keyes with pride. “This series is not the norm of cable programming, and it’s not the fin and fur of most outdoor shows. We like to feel we’re the forerunner in homegrown natural-resource programming.”

To locate a participating TV station in your area, or for show dates and times, log on to the Department Web site at [www.azgfd.com](http://www.azgfd.com). 🦋

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*Outdoor writer Lee Allen spends as much time as he can doing in-the-field research. When he can't be playing in the outdoors, he enjoys nature by proxy while watching “Arizona Wildlife Views.”*



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